

Bowl O Pinion
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Olympic Dream, Olympic Nightmare

By Jim Goodwin

For as long as we have been writing about bowling, and that has been a very long time, there has been some sort of effort to get our sport into the Olympic Games.

It's as if bowling is an inch worm trying and trying to get to the top of a tree, and each time it gets close, a gust of wind casts it down to the bottom. It gets back up and tries again, and again it is thwarted. And again and again in what seems like an endless journey.

On September 28, bowling was one of eight sports being considered for inclusion in the 2020 Games in Japan. Hopes were very high because Japan is a very friendly place for bowling ... it is very popular there. And of the eight, they chose five, but bowling was not one of them. We won't name them here because this is not about those sports. It is about bowling and about why it gets so little respect and recognition in the world of sports.

Kevin Dornberger, president of World Bowling, is the current man in charge of bowling's bid for Olympic status. On September 28, he must have felt like the kid who did not get any Christmas presents.

He confessed to us that it was a very, very disappointing day. But he has learned in his many years in bowling not to overreact to the bad news, so he put out a positive statement that expressed disappointment and vowed to continue the fight. That is what professionals do.

But don't you just wish that sometime, someone in bowling would shout, "We are mad as hell and we are not going to take it anymore!"

Of course, we know Kevin's approach is right, and we greatly admire his tenacity; but at the same time, we just have a hard time understanding why bowling can't seem to catch a break when it comes to the Olympics.

But if we are honest, we know some of the reasons why ... and Kevin is also honest about how bowling needs to change to have a chance on the world sports stage.

"My view is that we need to concentrate on three areas," said Dornberger. "Image, presentation of the sport (scoring system, spectator appeal, etc.), and attractiveness to youth."

We have heard those things before. In fact, we served on a World Bowling Committee to develop a better scoring system recently. But that is only one step, and it only scratches the surface of what needs to be done in the future.

Many efforts are also under way in youth bowling. Junior Gold has found success, and what the Teen Masters has done is fantastic. But again, it only scratches the surface, and we must not get complacent thinking that youth bowling is anywhere close to where it needs to be and should be.

The big elephant in the room in our view is IMAGE. How long will it take to change the perception that bowling is merely a nice recreation and not a sport at all? Will we ever wake up and realize that we cannot continue to tell people that BOWLING IS FUN? That bowling is a party activity? That anyone can do it?

No, we won't stop saying those things because they are all true, and all are necessary to promote the business of bowling ... and like it or not, the business drives the sport.

But how about a little or a lot more support for organizations like the PBA and PWBA and coaching and anything else that projects Sport Bowling. And while we are at it, how about a little or a lot more support for the media that publicizes the sport?

According to Dornberger, the good news is that bowling has never been on the short list before, and these days the process has changed so that it does not take millions of dollars to get considered.

However, millions have already been spent in the 1980s and 90s, and most recently by Round 1 in the Tokyo effort. What do we have to show for that? A demonstration appearance in Korea in 1988 and a small unofficial appearance in Atlanta in 1996 -- in other words, not much.

Even after this latest setback, Dornberger seems as determined as ever to redouble the efforts for the 2024 Games and beyond.

“We will need the global industry to agree on a strategy and parameters -- federation members, the commercial industry, and bowling proprietors,” he said.

The big questions now are HOW? And WHEN?

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